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ABSTRACT

Classes for senior adults (adults sixty years old or older, or retired) have become commonplace. Many instructors have no experience with this kind of student, so the need for instructors trained in special learning theories and practices that apply to senior adults has been identified. This report is designed to serve as a refresher or supplement to a faculty inservice seminar series on adult learning theory. Areas covered include publicity, course planning, class scheduling, classroom setting, instructional techniques, retention, objectives, learning activities, and physical and emotional factors. An outline for a class in health education for senior adults is included, as well as a sample interest survey. (AH)d

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TO DEVELOP THE LEARNING THEORY AND CURRICULUM FOR A HEALTH CLASS FOR ELDERLY ADULTS

by

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Los Angeles Valley College

A PRACTICUM PRESENTED TO NOVA UNIVERSITY
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TO DEVELOP THE LEARNING THEORY AND CURRICULUM

FOR A HEALTH CLASS FOR ELDERLY ADULTS

I. INTRODUCTION

Los Angeles Valley College has begun an extensive program for senior adults sixty years old and older or retired. During the past two years the college has developed this program through our community services. Now the college is embarking on a program of credit classes which appeal to the senior adults. This practicum is an outline of learning theory and methods of application which pertain to senior adults. The second part of the practicum is a brief outline of topics which senior citizens have indicated an interest in having included in a health class.

II. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The senior adult program at L. A. Valley College has expanded tremendously over the past three years. The "Gold Card" membership, which is our senior adult organization, has reached 3500. Many activities are offered through our Community Services Program. Recently the senior adults have shown an interest in credit classes.

The senior adults have indicated several classes that they would like to have offered, among them Health. Miss Lois Hamer, Coordinator for Senior Adult Programs and Mr. Paul Whalen, Dean of College Development, have asked that a curriculum outline be developed but more important a section for the instructor on how the senior

adult learns. The college attempted a class recently for senior adults that has not been successful because of the instructor's inadequate preparation in the learning theory and applications area. The college will attempt to avoid this in the future through in-service training and the inclusion of a section on the subject with future lesson plans.

Research on the subject included material from the Ethel Percy Andrus Gerontology Center at the University of Southern California; The Journal of Gerontology, Cognitive Processes in Maturity and Old Age, Psychological Aspects of Retirement, and other published materials. The idea is to have an outline of learning theories for senior adults that will remind the instructor of the material presented in the in-service training.

III. PROCEDURE IN GATHERING MATERIAL

Material on the learning theories and practices that pertain to senior adults was gathered. This material was organized, primarily in outline form, in such a way as to be an easy reminder to the instructor of where the special areas of emphasis are that must be placed in a class for senior adults. Since the instructor will have attended a seminar series on learning theory before teaching the class, this first part of the practicum will serve as a reminder or a refresher for the instructor.

The second part of the practicum is an outline for a health class. A survey (see Appendix) was taken, of a random sample of 100 Gold Card members to determine what topics should be included in the

in the health curriculum. The outline is brief since each individual class will help formulate the content of each subject.

IV. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The result is the following outline of learning theory and practice for senior adults and an outline for a proposed health class which will be used by the college in one of its first credit class offerings for senior adults.

L. A. Valley College has received a Clark Foundation grant, since the proposal was written, to re-train senior adults for employment and to train employers in the special needs of the senior adult/employee. The coordinator of the program feels that this practicum, only slightly modified, would be ideal for the instructor of the re-training class and for the employer seminar series.

A SUMMARY OF LEARNING THEORY FOR OLDER ADULTS

As an instructor of senior adult classes, one should be familiar with special circumstances which govern the learning effectiveness in senior adults. Senior adults continue their education for specific reasons: to educate themselves, find answers, formulate questions, and improve their ability to know, feel, and act.

Publicity

1. Attraction
   a. The class must deal with the life of the adult.
   b. The class information should make a difference in the person's life.

When a and b are encouraging then participation is most likely to occur. There may be a wide range of attraction from a personal goal to an escape.

Planning the class

In planning a class for the senior adult, there are several things that should be observed:

1. The particular class should be started as a result of a survey of some sort. There should be a demonstrated need.
2. Find out what the students want to learn.
3. Present short units of work.
4. Be sure there is a logical sequence to the classes and that things are presented in context.
5. Plan for several short breaks during the class.

6. Plan the lessons remembering that senior adults learn more slowly.
7. Don't give "busy work." This will kill the interest of the senior adult very fast.
8. Plan for a lot of discussion and group activity.
9. Let each person work in his/her own interest area, that is meaningful to them, as much as possible.
10. Try to plan areas where everyone can have successes, where they can be "experts" and feel important to the group.
11. As soon as possible, ascertain what expertise there is in the class and bring this into the lesson.
12. Develop a group atmosphere in your lesson plan so that each student gets to know the others and work together.
13. Don't give essays of any type. Most elderly people have problems with arthritis and other disorders that affect writing.

Class scheduling

From a scheduling standpoint, it appears that afternoon classes are better than morning classes. After the mid-fifties people seem to work better in the afternoons than in the mornings. The reasons will be taken up in a later section.

Classroom setting

1. Good illumination. Better light and more light. No flickering light.
2. Arrange seating so that students do not face the light.

3. Arrange seating so that people are close to the speaker and demonstrations.
4. Demonstrations should be able to be focused on easily by:
   a. the use of a neutral background;
   b. the use of sharp contrasting colors;
   c. the use of large charts, diagrams, and pictures;
   d. the use of large, clear writing or printing;
   e. being sure the blackboard and chart areas are clear of any distractions;
   f. typing or duplicating materials in pica type or double spaced.
5. Learning for an adult usually occurs within a societal context. Keep a social atmosphere.
6. Be aware of the major influences within the setting. Many of these can be used to increase learning (e.g., professionals in various areas).
7. Physical comfort of the classroom should be carefully considered; heat, ventilation, and furniture.
8. The classroom should be placed so that there is a minimum of stair climbing.
9. End the class promptly; do not keep the class overtime.

Instructional techniques

In the teaching of senior adults the instructor should be aware of individual characteristics and the setting where the learning is taking place. The instructor should set objectives, activities, and evaluations with the students.

The instructor should:

1. Speak more slowly and distinctly.
2. Stand still so that he can be focused on easily and those who lipread, either consciously or unconsciously, can do so.
3. Use simple, well-chosen words. Be sure the meaning is clear.
4. Clearly enunciate unusual words, unfamiliar names, and numbers. Then print them on the blackboard.
5. Study the students' faces to determine whether they are hearing.
6. Be sure to use the blackboard to help suppliment poor hearing. Double exposure of points aid learning.
7. Face the group when you talk. Don't turn away.
8. Eliminate inside or outside noises that interfere. Wait until temporary noises pass before going on with the lesson.
9. Ask any of the group to tell you if they cannot hear.
10. Let senior adults choose their own work tempo. They should be encouraged and stimulated, not rushed.
11. Keep a social atmosphere. Make each feel accepted and welcome.
12. Have a lot of discussion from the group. Let them express their opinions and experiences.
13. End the class promptly.
14. Repeat important points frequently and summarize often.
15. In instruction, focus on a central principle or idea, then expand from the central theme with various learning techniques.
16. Be sure the senior adult sees the relationship of the current

tasks to his objective. They will want to use what they learn soon after they learn it.

17. Minimize errors. Never use scarcasm or ridicule. Accentuate the positive; eliminate the negative.
18. Senior adults very often expect achievement beyond their capacity. Be observant for signs and symptoms so that you can give encouragement and help.
19. Assist each to achieve at least one important educational goal.
20. Overly intense motivation induces anxiety which interferes with learning. Set realistic objectives.

Retention

1. If an adult drops, it is worse than if he or she had never enrolled at all.
2. Retention is associated with a careful match between participant aspirations and program characteristics, participant's level of education, participant's investment in the program, and shortness of the program.
3. About half of the dropouts do so for reasons unrelated to the educational program.
4. Postcards and phone calls help to encourage students to come to class.

Setting objectives

1. Aspirations of the learner and the purposes of the teacher should be similar.

2. Have the group suggest objectives for a wider range.
3. Help the learner to select and focus on a few meaningful objectives from a wide range.
4. Help the learner to consider outcomes of objectives.
5. Have the learner make a statement of the objectives he hopes to experience for clarification.
6. The teacher should encourage reevaluation of objectives by the student.

Learning activities

1. Selection depends on the educational objectives, learner characteristics and the shifting emphases.
2. All should emphasize the relating of new learnings to adult experience.
3. Activities include:
   a) seminars - effective for the rigorous analysis of ideas;
   b) workshops - builds well on experiences of group members;
   c) case studies - helps analysis of problems;
   d) buzz groups - quick way to obtain list of preferences, reactions, or questions;
   e) role playing - provides an opportunity to experience and analyze;
   f) sensitivity training - helps the learner better understand how he functions in group settings.
4. Adults seek to achieve educational objectives within four types of settings:
   a) individual;

b) temporary group;

c) organizational;

d) community.

The preceding presents an outline of points that you, as an instructor of senior adults, should be aware of and use in your class preparation and instruction. The following pages will emphasize and enlarge on the reasons behind the recommendations.

Physical and emotional factors

Some of the physical and emotional factors that determine the aforementioned recommendations are:

Vision

1. Narrowing of the visual field;
2. Difficult adaptation to sudden changes in light and dark;
3. Reduced peripheral vision;
4. Defective color vision.

Hearing

1. Increased hearing deficiencies;
2. Slower auditory responses (e.g., hard to follow rapid speech).

Physiological

1. Body less able to adapt to high and low external temperatures (e.g., older people become uncomfortable quickly);
2. Capacity for physical work declines at age seventy. It is about 50 percent of that at age forty.
3. The reaction time of the older adult is much slower.

Psychological changes.

Three primary areas in which changes with age may influence learning most directly are:

1. Ability (intellectual power)
2. Interests
3. Attitudes

Differences in learning between young and old are not as much if the speed factor is taken away. Intellectual power itself does not change from about twenty to beyond sixty. If there is a decline in mental powers, it seems to be from getting too little rather than too much work.

Interests and attitudes are important in teaching senior adults. Senior adults are more influenced by uselessness and harmfulness of the material to be learned than young adults. The old suffer more than the young from being frustrated by deprivation of success. The instructor must be careful that the material presented is useful and relevant information. The senior adult must be motivated and encouraged.

Affective learning is as important as cognitive and skill learning. The ability to learn with love and affection and to discover new feelings about yourself and others is extremely important to senior adults. They must receive deep and satisfying emotional experiences and learn to cultivate a wide range of interests. Our present system tends to destroy enjoyment of learning; you must encourage this.

The senior adult is extremely sensitive to failure and

anxiety. The instructor must minimize learning frustrations and offer encouragement constantly. Remember that learning for senior adults involves more unlearning than learning. Encourage opinions, sharing, and participation in group activities.

INSTRUCTOR

1. Experience
   a. Prior experience influences approach and effectiveness to learning.
   b. Prior learning may help or interfere with learning or be unrelated.
   c. Individual differences in learning abilities increase with age:
      1) old ideas;
      2) disuse of learning skills;
      3) need to establish connections between new learning and prior knowledge and experience.
2. Ability
   a. Learning ability declines gradually after fifty.
   b. Those things that are used are retained.
   c. More able adults still increase their ability slightly while the less able decline so that there is a wide range.
   d. More able adults learn more rapidly.
   e. Teacher should make an estimate of learning ability.
3. Motivation
   a. The motives that the adult has to learn should be a major determinant of learning outcomes.

b. If the activity is not relevant the adult will withdraw. He doesn't need it, it's voluntary.

c. Overly intense motivation induces anxiety which interferes with learning.

1) Teachers should facilitate efforts by learners to set realistic educational objectives.

4. Meaning

a. Adults need an active search for meaning and discovery of relationships between current competence and new learnings.

b. Understand why each learner is trying to learn.

5. Memory

a. Ability to remember depends on strength of registration and on factors operating to erase the registration.

b. Strength of registration depends on:

1) intensity;

2) frequency;

3) importance to learner.

c. Pacing is important to recall.

1. Recall is best under conditions similar to regular registration.

6. Condition

a. Physical and mental health is important to learning:

1) hearing loss;

2) vision loss;

3) a usually small illness can be incapacitating for a long time.

4) circulatory diseases reduce concentration and memory.

b. Facilities should have minimum glare and maximum sound amplification.

7. Pacing

a. Let them set their own pace:

1) try to have each adult discover his/her own pace and proceed at that pace;

2) older people take longer. They commonly shift their emphasis from speed to accuracy.

8. Complexity

a. Task should be complex enough not to be boring but not too much to be overwhelming.

9. Content

a. Practice and rehearsal are esential.

b. Memorization, social or verbal learning that entails consolidation and reorganization of previous learning needs a few trials.

10. Feedback

a. Adults learn more effectively when they receive feedback regarding how they are progressing.

b. Immediate feedback, recognition and reward help to shape and reinforce new learning.

c. Positive reinforcement is much more effective than negative.

11. Adjustment

a. Adults usually have trouble learning when they experience

substantial social or personal maladjustment:

1) anxiety;

2) defensiveness.

b. Provide guidance and support.

c. Minimize maladjustment.

d. Emphasize success.

"The following are miscellaneous facts and conclusions regarding the psychological aspects of aging, reported by various researchers:

1. Frequently the fear of aging, rather than the aging process itself, induces mental deterioration. This is the result of social pressures in our society and calls for a better understanding of the place of the aged in the picture of the full life span.
2. Older workers are:
   a. Steadier in their jobs, require less frequent replacement, and are less expensive in training.
   b. More careful with equipment, less wasteful of materials and have fewer industrial accidents in relation to hours worked.
   c. Less distracted by social interests and tend to develop a strong sense of loyalty and responsibility.
   d. Sick more often, and require longer to recover from illness or accident, but they show greater caution and have a lower accident rate. Work and social responsibilities were the sources of greatest

happiness."[1]

In the senior adult there is a great retention of the power to learn, only a slowing in the rate of learning.

The instructor must:

1. Understand what is to be learned. The class should set their own objectives. They can be set for each segment and for the class as a whole.
2. Understand useful procedures to help the learners achieve their learning objectives. Interaction between individuals will bring new information and experiences. The instructor should select and organize learning activities to fit the individual learning style so he can achieve objectives.
   a. role playing;
   b. case analysis;
   c. informal presentations.

Evaluation

The learner must:

1. Be positive. Don't pressure. Minimize grading.
2. Judge on an individual basis. Make a comparison between expectations and performance.
3. Let the learner self-evaluate.

The program:

1. Were the objectives too broad?
2. Were the objectives too narrow?
3. Were the objectives about right?

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[1]Andrew Hendrickson (ed.), A Manual on Planning Educational Programs for Older Adults (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1973), p. 119.

4. Were the learning activities properly planned so that they contributed to learning?

5. Were the benefits derived worth the time and effort?

Health Class

The results of the subject interest survey of senior adults showed that the five subjects of greatest interest were: Leisure Activities, Nutrition, Exercise, Federal Health Plans, and Agencies That can Help You.

In planning the class, the structure should be flexible. From the main topics, previously mentioned, the class should be led into selecting more specific areas of interest. The subtopics listed are only to be used as suggestions. As much as possible, there should be participation from the group. The class should have actual experiences when the opportunities present themselves.

HEALTH CLASS OUTLINE

I. Leisure Activities
   - A. How do leisure activities help? (Mental, Physical)
   - B. What type of activities are best?
   - C. Where to go for inexpensive programs?

II. Exercise
   - A. Why exercise? What advantages are there to exercise?
   - B. How does physical fitness help?
   - C. Effect on the cardiovascular system.
   - D. Effect on weight and muscle tone.
   - E. Effect on mental health.

III. Nutrition

A. Needs of the mature body.

B. How to cook for one or two.

C. What foods get the balanced diet you need.

D. Relationship between nutrition and weight.

E. Food fallacies.

F. Recipes

IV. Federal Health Plans

A. Medi-Care, Medi-Cal, the new proposed federal health plan.

B. What can they expect from the plans?

C. Are they enrolled in a plan?

D. What are the qualifications?

V. Agencies That Can Help You

A. What agencies?

B. What do they do?

C. How are they contacted?

D. How are they financed?

E. Do they charge for service?

F. Qualifications.

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APPENDIX

Dear Gold Card Member:

Los Angeles Valley College is planning a possible health program for Senior Citizens. If we are able to present this class, we would like to know the topics that would interest you. Please place an X by the five topics listed below that are of most interest to you. Return as soon as possible in enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope.

_____ Exercise

_____ Leisure Activities

_____ Heart Disease

_____ Respiratory Diseases

_____ Eye Care

_____ Teeth Care

_____ Foot Care

_____ Pollution

_____ Cancer

_____ Life and Health Insurance

_____ Federal Health Plan

_____ Alcoholism

_____ Your Mental Health

_____ Death and Funerals

_____ Wills

_____ What is Aging

_____ Nutrition - How to Cook for Two or One

_____ Medical Fraud

_____ Consumer Fraud

_____ Sexual Life

_____ Agencies That Can Help You

Please write in other suggestions on the reverse side.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

MAR 07 1975

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